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P 212202Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2962
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0467
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY 9454
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6219
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1767
RUEHQH/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6877
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY 4892
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4436
RUCNNTA/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1927
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1548
RHMFIS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BOGOTA 001920

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREF PHUM PREL CO

SUBJECT: UNHCR AND GOC AGRICULTURE MINISTER SIGN IDP LAND
RIGHTS ACCORD

REF: BOGOTA 1571

SUMMARY

¶1. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed an agreement on April 7 with the GOC's Agriculture Ministry to implement joint projects to protect and restore land rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs). UNHCR believes the new accord complements previous agreements to advise and provide technical support to the GOC on IDP rights and assistance. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On April 7, UNHCR Colombia and the Colombian Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MOA) announced a framework agreement to work together to implement joint projects to protect and restore the land rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs). UNHCR Colombia's Resident Representative Jean Noel Wetterwald and Agriculture Minister Andres Arias signed the accord with Colombian President Uribe in attendance.

¶3. Discussions on the agreement began in February after local press reported that the MOA planned to allow agribusiness interests to access 17,000 hectares of land in Carimagua (Meta). In 2004, the GOC had promised to give this land to IDPs as a reparation. The media reports triggered a political controversy, leading the MOA to cancel the agribusiness land deal. At the same time, Wetterwald approached Agricultural Minister Arias and offered to work with MOA on IDP land issues.

¶4. Under the agreement, UNHCR and the MOA will help the 2.4 million registered IDPs recover or obtain reparations for the estimated 6 million hectares that they lost due to violence or threats by terrorist groups. Wetterwald said the agreement, along with the GOC's recent reparations decree (see reftel), shows the GOC is serious about resolving IDP land issues - especially collective land issues involving indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Wetterwald expects some human rights groups will criticize UNHCR for having "surrendered" to the GOC on land issues, but added that the initiative is consistent with UNHCR Colombia's 1999 Memorandum of Intent with the GOC to advise and provide technical support to the government on issues related to displaced persons.

¶5. UNHCR Colombia's Land Program Coordinator Adriana Buchelli told us UNHCR hopes to work with the MOA over the next year

to resolve at least three emblematic cases to test the challenges, gaps and opportunities in the restitution process. UNHCR envisions other projects under the UNHCR/MOA agreement that will complement the four-year old Tierras Project. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) manages the Tierras Project which has registered about 2 million hectares of land forcibly abandoned by IDPs, thereby preventing its sale. IOM works with the GOC's Accion Social to implement the Tierras Project. The GOC, UNHCR, USAID and the World Bank are the principal donors/advisors.

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